WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for transmitting electronic data, the method comprising:

receiving, at a communications system host, electronic data transmitted from a sender and addressed to an intended recipient;

authenticating the electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data; and

appending information to the electronic data indicating that the electronic data have been authenticated.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating comprises identifying the sender of the electronic data.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein the sender is identified by a screen name.

4. The method of claim 2 wherein the sender is identified by an IP address.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating further comprises designating a level of security corresponding to the sender of the electronic data.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating further comprises verifying that at least one attribute of the electronic data is an attribute of an authorized sender.

7. The method of claim 2 wherein the attribute comprises a screen name.

8. The method of claim 2 wherein the attribute comprises an IP address.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein authenticating further comprises designating a level of security corresponding to at least one attribute of the electronic data.

10. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

storing content of the electronic data in a first storage area of the communications system host; and

4   storing attributes of the electronic data in a second storage area of the

5   communications system host.

6

7   11. The method of claim 1 further comprising presenting the appended information to the

8   intended recipient.

1   12. The method of claim 1 wherein the appended information is presented with the attributes

2   of the electronic data.

1   13 The method of claim 11 wherein the appended information is presented with the content

2   of the electronic data.

1   14. The method of claim 11 wherein the appended information is capable of being rendered

2   by the intended recipient as an icon indicative of authentication.

1   15. The method of claim 11 wherein the appended information is capable of being rendered

2   by the intended recipient as a graphical user interface indicative of authentication.

1   16. The method of claim 15 wherein the graphical user interface includes a border indicative

2   of authentication around contents of electronic data.

1   17. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic data comprises an e-mail message.

1   18. The method of claim 1 wherein the electronic data comprises an instant message.

1   19. An apparatus for transmitting electronic data, the apparatus comprising a host configured

2   to:

3   receive, at a communications system host, electronic data transmitted from a sender

4   and addressed to an intended recipient;

5   authenticate the electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data; and

6   append information to the electronic data indicating that the electronic data have been

7   authenticated.

1   20. A computer program, stored on a computer readable medium, comprising instructions

2   for:

3   receiving, at a communications system host, electronic data transmitted from a sender

4   and addressed to an intended recipient;

5   authenticating the electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data; and

6   appending information to the electronic data indicating that the electronic data have been

7   authenticated.

1   21. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a disc.

22. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a client
device.

23. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a host
device.

24. The computer program of claim 20 wherein the computer readable medium is a
propagated signal.

1   25. A method for receiving electronic data transmitted from a sender to an intended recipient

2   through a communications system, the communications system authenticating the electronic

3   data based on attributes of the electronic data, the method comprising:

4   receiving, from a communications system host, information indicating that the

5   electronic data have been authenticated; and

6   rendering the information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the user

7   of the intended recipient that the electronic data has been authenticated.

1   26. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered by the intended recipient as

2   an icon indicative of authentication.

1   27. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered by the intended recipient as

2   a graphical user interface indicative of authentication.

1   28. The method of claim 27 wherein the graphical user interface includes a border indicative

2   of authentication around contents of the electronic data.

1   29. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered with contents of the

2   electronic data.

1   30. The method of claim 25 wherein the information is rendered with attributes of the

2   electronic data.

1   31. The method of claim 25 wherein the electronic data comprises an e-mail message.

1   32. The method of claim 25 wherein the electronic data comprises an instant message.

1   33. An apparatus for receiving electronic data transmitted from a sender to an intended

2   recipient through a communications system, the communications system authenticating the

3   electronic data based on attributes of the electronic data, the apparatus comprising a client

4   configured to:

5   receive, from a communications system host, information indicating that the

6   electronic data have been authenticated; and

7   render the appended information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the

8   user of the intended recipient that the electronic data have been authenticated.

1   34. A computer program stored on a computer-readable medium for receiving electronic

2   data transmitted from a sender to an intended recipient through a communications system, the

3   communications system authenticating the electronic data based on attributes of electronic

4   data, the computer program comprising instructions for:

5   receiving, from a communications system host, information indicating that the

6   electronic data have been authenticated; and

7   rendering the information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the user

8   of the intended recipient that the electronic data have been authenticated.

1   35. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a disc.

1   36. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a client

2   device.

1   37. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a host

2   device.

1   38. The computer program of claim 34, wherein the computer readable medium is a

2   propagated signal.

1   39. A graphical user interface for rendering information associated with electronic data

2   transmitted from a sender to an intended recipient, the graphical user interface rendering the

3   information to a user of the intended recipient so as to inform the user of the intended

4   recipient that the electronic data have been authenticated, the graphical user interface

5   comprising a border indicative of authentication around contents of the electronic data.